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The Ottomanism of the Non-Turkish Groups: The Arabs and the Kurds after 1908

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Abstract

After 1909, the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) abandoned the Ottomanist ideals that had earlier characterised the group, adopting instead a purely Turkish nationalist ideology. They were not necessarily hostile to Arab and Kurdish communities, but considered that the latter had no say in the definition of the Empire, let alone in its future. In contrast, many Arab and Kurdish intellectuals continued to define themselves as Ottomanists. These intellectuals, including Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī and Şerif Pasha, were defenders of the fraternity of the Islamic *umma* and, before the 'nationalist-turn' they took after World War I, were opposed to any kind of nationalism within Islam. They could not, however, easily justify the fusion of Islam and an Ottoman entity defined as Turkish. Integration into the Ottoman Empire for them did not imply the dissolution of the Arab and the Kurdish component within its Islamic imperial fabric.

Keywords

Arabs – Kurds – Ottomanism – Muslim fraternity – nationalism – Committee of Union and Progress – Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī – Şerif Pasha

Introduction

Seen from Istanbul, Ottomanism has always been a rather vague concept that no authority has ever been able or willing to define. Although the term has been widely used in the second half of the 19th century, it has never been associated with a concerted policy that takes into account the extraordinary

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demographic, ethnic, religious and social complexity of the Empire. Through available evidence, one gets in fact the impression that during the Tanzimat period (1839–1876), as well as under the Hamidian (1876–1908/1909) and Unionist (1908/9–1918) rules, Istanbul has accepted that the vast non-Muslim and non-Turkish territories belong to the Empire, requiring no Ottoman 'social contract'. This assumption may explain why the power-holders in Istanbul have never asked the different social components what kind of Empire they want to belong to. No wonder, then, that any reform, including the most radical ones such as the Imperial rescript of 1856 establishing theoretical equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, was perceived as a state act rather than as the central power's response to the demands of the non-Muslim and Muslim communities. One should not be surprised, either, that acts of dissidence by any subordinated linguistic or religious communities, not to mention those by independentist movements, have always been apprehended as an act of enmity and betrayal against the state or as a collaboration with the Empire's enemies, and not as the expression of a genuine contest with its own historical, social and political *raison d'être*.

For at least two reasons the concept of Ottomanism could not give birth to a new Ottoman society, ensuring the equality of the Ottomans who, in fact, have been defined simply as 'subjects' and not as citizens. The first one was that Ottomanism was perceived, before everything else, as an agenda for integrating the non-Muslims into the Ottoman system, and indeed the local assemblies as well as the *ad hoc meclis*es (assemblies) created during or after the Tanzimat period included non-Muslim representatives. On the other hand, however, the concepts of Ottomanity (*Osmanlılık*) and Turkishness emerged in a quasi-simultaneity, the latter becoming much more powerful than the first one throughout the Tanzimat and post-Tanzimat decades. It is true that the Turks themselves have never been accepted as citizens, i.e., as subjects with the right to participate in the decision-making process, but Turkishness as a meta-historical category has been gradually transformed into the very plinth of the state. For instance, the Young Ottomans, who have been formed during the Tanzimat period and thanks to its reforms in the educational field, defended the idea of the unity of the Ottoman *anasır* (components), but at the explicit condition that it would materialise under the domination (and not simply the banner) of the Turks.[1] Some of the Young Ottomans, such as the well-known Ziya Pasha (1825–1880), who was highly disturbed by the promotion of the non-Muslim communities in the Empire, did not hesitate to threaten them by

1 Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *XIX. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (İstanbul: Çağlayan Yayınları, 1967), 403.

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physical destruction.[2] Under the Committee Union and Progress (CUP), Ottomanism was much more strongly subordinated to the assumption that the Turks were or should become the masters of the Empire.[3] The Ottomanism of the Tanzimat bureaucracy was basically linked to a desperate attempt to save the state. According to a statement attributed to Keçecizade Fuat Pasha (1814–1869), who acted as foreign secretary and *sadrazam* (Grand Vizier) during the Tanzimat period, the state could survive only if it 'belonged' to someone: "To whom does this state belong to? It does not belong to this one, or to that one. To whom, thus, does it belong to?"[4] The answer to this question has been given first under Sultan Abdülhamid II,[5] and thereafter, and much more clearly, under the Unionist regime: this 'someone' was *the* Turk, and solely *the* Turk.

The second reason making the concept of Ottomanism a rather vague one might be related to the absence of any broad discussions on the issue itself. It is obvious that from the Serbian and Greek revolts in the first decades of 19th century on, nationalism has become the dominant political current in the Balkans, leaving thus very little space for a debate on Ottomanism as the would-be uniting program of different Ottoman communities. The situation was not better elsewhere in the Empire: in spite of existence of strong Armenian organisations with sophisticated political debates and the pre-1905–1908 urban unrests,[6] Asia Minor could hardly be defined as a suitable space for political debates. That was also the case for the Arab provinces, which were certainly open to European influence and hosted a very dynamic intellectual life, but – as far as I am aware of – had no political organisation comparable to the Balkan or Armenian revolutionary committees and could be defined as a pre-political space. Arab nationalism itself was very weak. Even after the 1908 Unionist *Pronunciamiento*, large parts of the Ottoman lands in the Southern and Eastern *vilayet*s hosted a rather weak level of political activism. From this point of view, the Ottoman situation was radically different from the one prevailing in Austria-Hungary, another multi-ethnic, multi-religious empire where competitive political currents did exist and discussions on the future of the Empire were quite intense. The 'Austro-Marxists', for instance, developed a so-

2 Mümtaz'er Türköne, *Siyasi İdeoloji Olarak İslamcılığın Doğuşu,* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991), 470.

3 Cf. Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın in Sina Akşin, *Jön-Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1980), 169.

4 Emin Türk Eliçin, *Kemalist devrim Ideolojisi* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1970), 172.

5 David Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876–1908* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

6 Cf. Youri A. Petrosyan, *Sovyet Gözüyle Jön-Türkler* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1974).

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phisticated program in order to resolve Empire's 'national issues'.[7] In contrast, Ottoman society lacked instances that could mediate the idea of Ottomanism, define it and make it into a 'local' product.

1908–1914: Ottomanist Demands and Aspirations

This does not, however, mean that the actors coming from these near or remote 'peripheries' were passive victims of policies decided in Istanbul. On the contrary, some of these actors tried, during the 1908–1914 period, to elaborate an Ottomanist sense of belonging, if not an Ottoman identity. As Hasan Kayalı puts it, "no sooner had [the] Parliament opened [...] many Arab deputies joined a society called the Arab-Ottoman Brotherhood" whose founders were mainly Arab ex-army officers.[8] Most of the

> Arab leaders had faith in the Ottomanist vision that the 1908 Revolution promised. Although separatist schemes continued to originate from outside of the borders of the Ottoman state, for most Arabs the new constitution and Parliament dispelled any need for a separate existence.[9]

I will focus in this article on Arab and Kurdish examples. Before dealing with these cases, however, it is crucial to underline that the '1908 Moment' constituted probably the only reflexive 'Ottomanist' moment in many – but not all – parts of the Empire.[10] The three-confessional mass demonstrations in Istanbul and Izmir, as well as in the Balkans, in the aftermath of the Revolution, showed that many actors from different ethnic, religious and social origins considered themselves as being Ottomans, believed in the future of the Empire and hoped to be able to refound this already six-century-old entity on new, participative grounds. For instance, the otherwise radical Macedonian guerilla leader Yane Sandansky (1872–1915) proclaimed:

> Our country, which has faced so many ordeals by the past, celebrates today its renaissance.

7 See, for instance, Otto Bauer, *La question des nationalités et la social-démocratie*, vol. 2 (Paris: Etudes et Documentation internationales-Arcantère, 1987).

8 Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 68.

9 Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 70.

10 Elie Kedourie, *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies* (London: Frank Cass, 1974), 40f.

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> The revolutionary call of our brothers Young Turks find an echo within the people which has so much suffered!
> My Turkish compatriots! You constitute the majority of the people. Therefore, you have suffered more (than others) from the oppression of our common enemy. You were not, in your Turkish Empire, less slaves than your Christian compatriots.
> Dear Christian compatriots! You have been abused by those who explained you that your sufferings were due to the oppression of the Turkish people as such.[11]

Sandansky, who saluted the sacrifice of his Turkish revolutionary fellows, believed the Ottoman Empire should be refounded on internationalist or democratic principles, or on both. In his post-war memoirs, the well-known Armenian guerilla fighter Rouben Ter Minassian (1882–1951) also explained how, even though some of them were sceptical, the Armenian *fidai*s abandoned the armed struggle and decided to collaborate with the "Turkish revolutionaries".[12] Many Armenians also volunteered in the Balkan Wars alongside Ottoman troops.[13] Similarly, many Ottoman Greek intellectuals and politicians, such as Yorgo Boşo Efendi, thought that the events of 1908 would radically transform Ottoman society.

The non-Turkish Muslim communities, i.e., the Albanian, Kurdish and Arab ones, which constituted a form of 'Muslim periphery' of the 'Turkish hard-core' of the Empire under Abdülhamid II, were also extremely sensitive to what happened in Istanbul, but they were marked by important internal differentiations and did not follow similar lines. The Albanian case, which has been discussed by Nathalie Clayer[14] and Stefano Taglia in this volume, constituted a clear-cut exception. Under Abdülhamid II, repression of national/ist Albanian demands was somehow 'balanced' by using high-ranking Albanian civil servants "as the main 'pillar' of the Ottoman domination in the Balkans".[15] In his memoirs, which in fact reflect his overall vision of the world, the Sultan acknowledged his debt to the Albanians:

11 Fikret Adanır, *Makedonya Sorunu: Oluşumu ve 1908'e Kadar Gelişimi* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları, 2001), 267.

12 Rouben Ter Minassian, *Mémoires d'un partisan arménien, 1882–1950* (La Tour d'Aigues: Editions de l'Aube, 1990), 234.

13 Raymond H. Kevorkian, *Le génocide des Arméniens* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), 171.

14 Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe* (Paris: Karthala, 2007).

15 Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, 262.

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> The Albanians are our Muslim brothers and most loyal soldiers whom we can trust under any circumstances. Do they not form a circle around my sultanate? What would happen if we did not answer with love each weapon used in Albania?[16]

However, although the Muslims constituted the demographic majority of the country, Albanian 'national identity' was based on language, not on religion. Even though some Albanian intellectuals, such as Mehmet Akif (1873–1936) – who was born and died in Istanbul –[17] and many religious figures remained loyal to the Empire under the Unionist regime in the name of Muslim fraternity, religion was not sufficient to legitimise the submission of the 'Albanian nation' to 'Turkish domination' for the majority of the Albanian elite. It is true that many Albanians participated actively in the anti-Hamidian insurrection and saluted the 1908 revolution, but the fall of the *ancien régime* also accelerated Albania's independence. The extremely brutal measures that the CUP adopted to restore order and establish "equality of the Ottoman citizens"[18] could not but radicalise the Albanian contest and ultimately lead to the victorious Albanian insurrection of 1911–1912. As Şükrü Hanioğlu puts it:

> Ismail Kemal Bey (Ismail Qemali, 1844–1919), a loyal servant of the leaders of the Tanzimat (who, as he put it, 'would have done honor to any country in the world') admitted that the reforms, coupled with the harsh measures adopted against recalcitrant communities, 'concealed' the perpetual desire of the Turkish chauvinists to bring about the unification of all the races of the Empire.[19]

In contrast to Albania, the evolution of the Kurdish and Arab spaces was not determined by insurrectional dynamics. Kurdistan hosted a weak Kurdish nationalist movement, but a strong Islamic identity and powerful loyalties to the Hamidian regime. Under his long rule, in fact, Sultan Abdülhamid created personal affinities with many Kurdish dignitaries who had been integrated into the state's regional paramilitary forces, the *Hamidiyye* Cavalry.[20] He also

16 Abdülhamid, *Siyasi Hatıralarım* (İstanbul: Dergâh, 1084), 207.

17 Mehmet Akif Ersoy, *Safahat* (İstanbul: Inkilâp ve Aka YayInları, 1975).

18 Tahsin Uzer, *Makedonya Eşkiyalık Tarihi ve Son Osmanlı Yönetimi* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1980), 98–101.

19 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Turkism and the Young Turks, 1889–1908", in Hans-Lukas Kieser ed., *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-National Identities* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 5.

20 Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011).

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developed a double policy vis-à-vis the 'Northern part' of Kurdistan, directly linked to the Armenian issue, and the 'Southern Part', dealt with as a remote periphery. The Arab territories were both vast and extremely differentiated internally, with intellectual centres in cities such as Damascus, Beirut and Baghdad. Remote territories such as Yemen were in almost constant rebellion. Egypt was no longer a part of the Ottoman Empire, but it had close relations with Ottoman lands. It would be quite difficult to contest that the Arab elite expressed a peculiar attachment to the Ottoman Empire; but the Arab elite did not contest Ottoman authority, and exiled Arab nationalist figures such as Khalīl Ghanem (1846–1903) had a tiny social basis.[21]

It is important to underline that when it needed to Unionist power was able to take coercive measures in Kurdistan and Arab lands, where it had a real administrative and military presence. It was also able to co-opt local elites. However, it had almost completely ignored the need to develop an Ottomanist policy that took into account the specificities, aspirations and desiderata of the local population. Whether close or remote, these territories were in fact perceived as 'imperial colonies'.[22] Many figures of the new ruling elite had their origins in the Balkans and considered themselves as the 'children of conquerors' (*evlad-ı fatihan*). As Talat Pasha explained, the new generation of Unionists, which reorganised the CUP in Salonica between 1905 and 1908, came to power after a very short period of insurrectional dissidence, and found itself, all of a sudden, master of an Anatolia which was nothing less than a "Black Box" for them.[23] The Unionists lost the Balkans, including their most sacred city, Salonica, seat of their inner circle called 'the Ka'ba of the Liberty', during the First Balkan War (1912), but they never tried to rebuild the Empire through a full social, political and economic integration either of the Armenian and Greek communities of Asia Minor, or of the Arab and Kurdish populations.[24] As their poetry and military strategy during World War 1 shows, they instead fixed themselves another goal: Turan, a mythical country that no one could

21 Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

22 Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Edhem Eldem, *Un Ottoman en Orient: Osman Hamdi Bey en Irak, 1869–1871* (Arles: Actes-Sud, 2010); Klein, *The Margins of Empire*; Thomas Kühn, "Translators of Empire: Colonial Cosmopolitanism, Ottoman Bureaucrats and the Struggle over the Governance of Yemen", in Derryl N. Maclean & Sikeena Karmali Ahmad, *Cosmopolitanisms in Muslim Contexts: Perspectives from the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

23 Hülya Küçük, *Kurtuluş Savaşında Bektaşilik* (Ankara: Kitap Yayınevi, 2003), 114.

24 Hamit Bozarslan, "İttihadçılık Arap Vilayetlerini ve Kürdistanı Seviyormuydu? 1912–1916 Dönemi Osmanlı Vatan Tahayyülü Üzerine Bazı Notlar", forthcoming (2016).

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locate exactly on a map, but that was supposed to have a surface of "10.800.000 km²" and whose "43 million inhabitants" were eager to welcome their "Turkish brothers".[25]

In reality, Unionism's Turkist turn occurred long before the Balkan Wars: as the CUP's internal correspondence – published by Şükrü Hanioglu in his seminal work on the Young Turks – shows clearly, even during its clandestine period in Macedonia (1905–1908), the CUP was strongly attached to Turkish nationalism.[26] But the 1908 'July 23 Revolution', which was warmly welcomed by Ottoman society's non-Muslim communities, could not allow the Unionists to present themselves as defenders of an exclusive Turkish cause. Moreover, because their revolution was saluted, both internally and externally, as the 'French Revolution in the Orient' and because demonstrators spontaneously adopted the famous French revolutionary triad (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), they were obliged to adopt a non-chauvinistic position immediately after they gained power. However, after Bulgaria proclaimed independence and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire officially annexed of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which, in fact, did not change the real map of the Empire, the committee adopted two new orientations. First, it replaced the idea of liberty with the doctrine of *rabt-u-zabt* ("order and discipline"). According to Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), for instance – who by 1909 had already been promoted as the CUP's main ideologue – the "doctrine of the natural rights", which he held responsible for the French Revolution and post-revolutionary chaos, was "as adequate to destroy as incapable to construct". This "revolutionary microbe" could only be eliminated through the application of the motto according to which: "there are no rights, but duties."[27]

Second, the CUP abandoned Ottomanist ideals , adopting instead a purely Turkish nationalist ideology. Pro-Unionist ideologues such as Gökalp, Tekin Alp (1883–1961) and Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) condemned severely the 'corrupted' and 'cosmopolitan' French model. According to the theoretician Tekin Alp, "the training of a Frenchman" was "not national, but anti-national",

> the Germans proclaim their ideal in their national song "*Deutchland, Deutschland über alles …*" Every German knows this song from his childhood, all through his life it rings in his ears and with those words on his

25 Erol Köroğlu, *Türk Edebiyatı ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı (1914–1918): Propagandadan Millî Kimlik İnşasına* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2004), 152.

26 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

27 Ziya Gökalp, *Makaleler V* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), 156.

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> lips he dies - "*Deutschland, Deutschland, über alles*". And in very truth every German longs with his whole soul and will to see his nation "*über alles*". In striving for this ideal, the Germans have become a so great and powerful nation that they are now able to defy a whole world of assailants and defeat them all.[28]

In continuity, he added that after the July 23 Revolution:

> The Turks did not put a long time to understand their error. The beautiful illusions have dissipated. The revolutionary *fiat* had not taken place. In reality, the Ottomanism was only a real market of treachery. They could only loose in [playing this game].[29]

Gökalp, who knew little of German philosophy, also referred to Fichte in order to criticise the so-called 'French model'. The transposition of this model to the Ottoman case meant that the Turks had to Turkify their Empire instead of imagining it as an assembly of 'nations' and 'ethnic solidarities'.

Given the hegemonic position that the CUP occupied within the state and among the young officers, the voices of the very weak *Hürriyet ve İtilaf Fırkası* (Party of Liberty and Concord), which advocated a real decentralisation of the Empire, had no chance to be heard. One of the leaders of the Party, Mevlanzade Rıfat (1869/70–1931), a Kurd, later confessed his despair:

> Yes, we were observing that an Albanian from Yanya, a Wahhabi from Najaf, an *effendi* (intellectual) of Istanbul, a Zaydi of Yemen, a Jew of Salonica, a Bedouin from Hejaz, a Turk from Konya and a Kurd from Suleymaniye, a Greek from the Islands, and an Armenian from Van, did not have the same social and psychological conditions, the same traditions and life-styles. The central administration was not in capacity of imposing a law to these different components with the same strength and obtaining the same result.
>
> Yes, we wished that the juridical dispositions took into account the traditions of these *kavim*s ("nations", "communities"), and that the conflicts existing between them were resolved through their unification under the noble name of Ottomanity, and through the creation of prefectural {entities] as well as {the adoption} of laws taking into account their existence.

28 Jacob M. Landau, *Tekin Alp, Turkish Patriot, 1883–1961* (Istanbul, Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Institut, 1984), 133.

29 Ibid., 67.

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> Yes, we wanted each *kavim* (ethnic group, "nation") to emancipate itself and realize, according to its own understanding, its desire of progress and development.
> Yes, we wanted to liberate the [Ottoman] nation from violence that had been used in the name of the national government. For our history showed us that we had lost so much because of the violence of [tax-] collectors in order to administrate the nations and *kavim*s that we have conquered by use of force.[30]

The Unionist 'Turkist-Turn' and Arab and Kurdish Ottomanism

Tekin Alp as actually reaching the same conclusions as Yusuf Akçura, as were Ziya Gökalp, the pro-Unionist journalist Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın (1875–1957), and civil and paramilitary Turkish nationalist organisations such as *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland) and *Türk Gücü* (Force of Turks). In his famous *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Three Kinds of Politics), Akçura advocated, already by 1904, an exclusive Turkish nationalism and introduced ideas of social Darwinism among the exiled opposition milieu.[31]

It is, however, remarkable that these men of the pen and action failed, in their Turkist turn, to consider Arab and Kurdish aspirations, or simply to consider that Arabs and Kurds existed as important demographic communities of the Empire. These two communities were simply conceived as having no say in the definition of the Empire, let alone in its future. Through abandoning what they called the 'French 1789 model' already by 1909, the CUP was actually also abandoning any kind of Ottoman universalism, adopting instead an exclusive Turkishness that had unavoidable impacts on Kurds and Arabs. It is, however, equally remarkable that, in contrast to the Unionist *désamour* for them, many Kurdish and Arab intellectuals and dignitaries continued to act as local agents of Ottomanism, developing Ottomanist discourses. Although they had refuted any kind of separatism, these local agents were also radical in their own way, and tried to redefine the Ottoman Empire from the context of their respective peripheries, as well as developing some kind of identity policy.

The existence of a shared Ottoman time and Ottoman space has obviously played a role in the self-definition of these actors as Ottomans. If the Unionist elite had first a strong affiliation with the Balkans, and after 1912 expressed a

30 Rıfat Mevlanzade *Mevlanzade Rıfat'in Anıları, Hakk-ı Vatan yahud Tarik-i Mücahedede Hakikat Ketedilmez* (İstanbul: ARMA Yayınları, 1992), 621.

31 Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1976).

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violent nostalgia of this 'European Turkey', for the Kurds and the Arabs, the 'everyday Empire' had always been a predominantly 'Eastern' Empire. Naturally, the Balkans, Kurdistan and the Arab provinces were linked through many channels, including those of the social mobility, knowledge and elite circulation. But the Kurds and the overwhelming majority of Arabs belonged to the Empire because they were Muslims; that is, because they belonged, theoretically at least, to the *millet-i hâkime*, the dominant religious community.[32] For instance, for Said Halim Pasha (1865–1921), who developed a vague theory of Islamic civilisation and later became *sadrazam* of the Empire, Ottomanism was perfectly compatible with Islamic fraternity (Said Halim, n.d.). That was also the case for the Kurds who, at least at this specific moment of Ottoman history, considered Islam as the main category of identification and otherness.

The Muslim Arab and Kurdish Ottomanists in fact defended the fraternity of the Islamic *umma* and opposed any kind of nationalism within Islam. On the other hand, however, they could not easily justify the fusion of Islam with an Ottoman entity defined as Turkish. It is true that they had interiorised the Empire, but at the same time they remembered the histories of their own ethnic/national communities. For instance, the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands (1514–1516) was not based on a *kanun-u kadimiyye* (old law, charter of alliance),[33] but only on force. The Ottoman sultans spent much energy to legitimise their holding of the title of *khalife*.[34] It is true that a *kanun-u kadimiyye* linked the Kurds to the Ottoman Empire: the agreement reached in 1514 by Idris-i Bidlisi (1452–1520), a Kurdish *ʿālim,* and Selim I (1470–1520) allowed Kurds to participate in the Ottoman war efforts against Safavid Persia, in exchange for the preservation of the autonomy of the Kurdish emirates. This agreement was largely respected until the beginning of the 19th century, during which time the Kurdish emirates were gradually destroyed through massive coercion. But Ehmedê Khanî (1650–1707)'s famous epic poem, *Mem-û-Zin*, suggests that the medieval Kurdish elite continued to desire a Kurdish state.

32 Even for the Christian intellectuals who have played a decisive role in the *nahḍa* movement, it was almost impossible to distinguish the "Arabity" from Islam, a term which, by the turn of the 20th Century, could be defined as a religion, as well as a "culture", or a civilisation, represented then by the Ottoman Empire.

33 Ümit Meriç, *Cevdet Paşa'nın Cemiyet ve Devlet Görüşü* (İstanbul: Ötüken Yayınları, 1979), 103.

34 Bruce Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516–1918: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 207ff.; Brett M. Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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Integration into the Ottoman Empire, thus, did not mean the dissolution of the Arabs and the Kurds within its Islamic imperial fabric, a scenario that neither the Ottoman Palace and bureaucracy nor these communities could envision. Notwithstanding the clear awareness of their differences with the Turks, however, Islam mattered both for the Kurds and the Arabs even at the turn of the 20th century. Although they were descendants of the Kurdish *Botan* emirate and sons of the founder of the first Kurdish journal, *Kurdistan*, the famous Kurdish nationalist brothers Celadet (1893–1951) and Kamuran Bedirxan (1893–1978) mourned the Ottoman soldiers fallen in the First Balkan War and wrote a rather Ottoman-nationalist book on the 'fall of Edirne'.[35] Later, the two brothers would figure among the most prominent Kurdish nationalist figures. That was also true as far as the Arab world was concerned. The well-known reformist ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Kawākibī (1855–1902) and other intellectuals that the later Arab nationalists considered their precursors were, simultaneously, loyal to the Arab *daʿwa* (cause) and to the Ottoman Empire. During the First Balkan War, the deputies from the Arab lands, who represented a third of the Ottoman Assembly[36] and many Arab intellectuals, among them Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), adopted pro-Ottoman positions. Riḍā's pro-Ottomanism was particularly striking because he was known for his harsh criticism of Ottoman rule, which – according to him – was accountable for the decline of Islam and Arab culture.[37] In spite of his verbal radicalism, however, Riḍā ultimately remained Ottoman in his projections for the future.[38] Only some Christian intellectuals, such as Najīb ʿĀzūrī (1870–1916) and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzijī (1846–1906), problematised the issue of Turkish rule in terms of the "Arabs domination by the Turks,"[39] but without advocating a full-secessionist scenario.

This is not so say that there was no Arab nationalism, or at least no Arab aspiration for radical changes within the Empire. On the contrary, leagues such as *Hizb al-Lamarkazia al-ʿUthmānī* (Ottoman Administrative Decentralisation Party), the *al-ʿAhd* (the Pact) society established by Arab officers, or the secret a*l-Fatāt* (Young Arab Society) based in Paris (Saab, 1958) expressed federalist ideas. Many Arab intellectuals wished indeed to transform the Empire into a binational Arab–Turkish one (Antonius, 1945), in the mould of Austria–Hungary. *Al-ʿAhd*, for instance, aimed "to work for internal independence for the

35 Celadet Alî Bedirxan, *Edirne Sükutunun Iç Yüzü* (İstanbul: Avesta, 2009).

36 Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 212.

37 Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 21.

38 Ibid., 22ff.

39 Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 25ff.

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Arab countries, so that they will remain united with the Istanbul government" and suggested that the "Islamic caliphate [remain] as a consecrated trust in the hands of the Ottoman dynasty".[40] Najīb ʿĀzūrī, author of the famous *Le reveil de la nation arabe* (The Awakening of the Arab Nation),[41] envisioned the creation of 'homelands' for all the Ottoman nationalities, including the Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Albanians, and Turks, under an Ottoman umbrella.[42] Many Arab figures were, at once, Arabists and Ottomanists but saw no contradiction between the two affiliations, between their loyalty to the Empire and their struggle for nationhood. One should also bear in mind that these Arabists constituted only a small minority. According to C. Ernest Dawn, prior to World War I, "only 126 men were known to have been 'public advocates of Arab nationalism, or members of Arab nationalist societies'." A later evaluation brings this figure to only 180.[43] In fact, as Masters puts it:

> The new consensus posits that an Arab movement for independence from the Empire occurred relatively late and was supported largely by those members of the new middle class who felt passed over for the patronage from the state. In contrast, these individuals, largely drawn from their connection to the state either by serving in the military or in acquiring land remained loyal Ottomans until it was no longer feasible for them to do so.[44]

A similar double affiliation and loyalty could also be observed among Kurdish intellectuals. Both the *Kürt Terakki ve Teavün Cemiyeti* (The Society for the Elevation and Mutual Help) and the journal *Kürt Terakki ve Teavün Gazetesi* marked important steps in the formation of Kurdish nationalism, but they remained fundamentally Ottomanist. The Kurdish revolts of Bidlis, Baban, and Barzan, which all took place in 1914, expressed explicit Kurdish demands and in this sense distinguished themselves sharply from other, mainly anti-Armenian, Kurdish revolts of the same period; however, the leaders of these revolts, such as Mela (Mollah) Selim and Abdelselam Barzani, who had been executed, had strong religious personalities and were at the same time still

40 Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 30f.

41 Negib Azoury, *Le reveil de la nation arabe dans l'Asie turque: Partie asiatique de la question d'Orient et Programme de la Ligue de la Partie arabe* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1905).

42 Wajda Sendesni, *Les Jeunes Turcs en Egypte (1895–1908): Histoire politique et intellectuelle,* PhD Thesis, EHESS (2009), 244.

43 Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 29.

44 Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516–1918*, 203.

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Ottomanists.[45] For them, the revolt was simply a means of negotiating a new status with the state.[46]

Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī and Şerif Pasha

In spite of the Arab Revolt of 1916 and the "reign of terror"[47] of Cemal Pasha in Syria and Lebanon, under which some former Arab-Ottoman deputies such as Shukrī al-ʿAsalī, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Zāhrāwī were executed (6 May 1916),[48] this double allegiance to the nation and the Empire did not disappear immediately. Many tribes and dignitaries remained pro-Turkish even in the Hejaz, the very heart of the Arab Revolt.[49] In spite of being historically against the Ottoman domination, which they equated with Sunnism, the Iraqi Shias rebelled against the British troops in 1917 and fought against them alongside the Ottoman forces.[50] Ibrāhīm Hanānū (1869–1935), who started one of the first Syrian armed contests against the French occupation after World War 1 also expressed pro-Ottoman feelings.[51] There is no doubt that these two armed contests were defending either a national or a sectarian cause, but they also had, by default, an Ottomanist feature. Similarly, many Kurdish figures such as the famous Sayyid ʿAbd al-Qādir (1851–executed in 1925), chair of the Ottoman *Ayan* Assembly (the Senate) and leader of *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* (Kurdistan Elevation Society), were simultaneously Kurdists and Ottomanists. Even Şerif Pasha, who will be mentioned later on, had a double, Kurdish and Ottoman, allegiance before becoming the head of the Kurdish delegation during the Paris Peace Conference of 1920 and opted for an exclusive Kurdish nationalism.[52]

45 Celilê Celil, *XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kürtler* (Ankara: Öz-Ge, 1992); Celilê Celil, *13 Rupelên Balkeş ji Diroka Gelê Kurd* (Viyana: Institua Kurdzaniye, 2002), 113–38.

46 Djene Rhys Bajalan, *Between Accommodationism and Separatism: Kurds, Ottomans and the Politics of Nationality (1839–1914)*, PhD hesis, University of Oxford (2015).

47 Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 193.

48 Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire*, 220.

49 Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 36f.

50 Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Le mandat britannique en Irak : une rencontre entre plusieurs projets politiques", in Nadine Méouchy & Peter Sluglett ed., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 361–84.

51 Jean-David Mizrahi, *Genèse de l'Etat mandataire : Service de Renseignement et bandes armées en Syrie et au Liban dans les années 1920* (Paris: La Sorbonne, 2003).

52 Murat Bardakçı, *İttihadçı'nın Sandığı* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2013), 269–307.

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While many Arab and Kurdish intellectuals were active during the last Ottoman decade, I would like to mention here only two of them: Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī (1880–1967) and Şerif Pasha (1865–1951). What differentiates these figures from many others, such as Rashīd Riḍā, Georgi (Jurjī) Zaydān (1861–1914), or Said-i Kurdî (Nursi, 1878–1960), Abdurrahman Zapsu (1890–1958) and Ahmed Naim Babanzade (1872–1934), was that they were among the most prominent intellectual and/or political and administrative figures of the Empire in the post-1908 era; while fully assuming their ethnic identities, they were opposed not only to Turkish nationalism, but also to nationalism as a principle, and advocated a pan-Ottoman fraternity. In contrast to the intellectuals with an Islamic/Islamist sensibility, they were westernised and formulated a secular and universal criticism of nationalism. Finally, in contrast to their pre-War affiliations, they both became strong advocates of respectively Arab and Kurdish nationalism after the debacle of 1918. Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī would be known as the main ideologue of a radicalised Pan-Arab version of the Arab nationalism, before being marginalised by a much more radical current represented by figures such as the pro-Nazi Sāmī Shawkat (1893–?) and Michel Aflaq (1910–1989), founder of the Baʿth Party.[53] From 1920 to his death in 1951, Şerif Pasha would also remain a preeminent figure of the Kurdish nationalist milieu. Under Unionist rule, both al-Ḥuṣrī and Şerif formulated an Ottomanist worldview not thanks to Istanbul's efforts to integrate them but, rather, in spite of the total absence of such an effort (Şerif Pasha was even constrained to leave the Empire by the CUP, which tried to assassinate him in Paris where he was exiled). Their Ottomanism ended only when the Ottoman Empire vanished as a result of its participation to World War I alongside Germany and Austria-Hungary, an act that Şerif had condemned as a crime already by 1914.

Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī and the Opposition to the 'German Model'

Under Unionist rule, Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī was employed at the Ottoman Ministry of Education as a high-ranking civil servant. In this capacity, he was emphasising that Western civilisation, of which he was an advocate, was not reducible to science and techniques,[54] as many Ottoman politicians and thinkers maintained. Al-Ḥuṣrī became famous thanks to his harsh polemic with Ziya Gökalp

53 Sylvia G. Haim ed., *Arab Nationalism: An Anthology* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962).

54 William L. Cleveland, *The Making of an Arab Nationalist: Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati al-Husri* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); see, also,

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on the issue of nationalism, and broadly speaking on the 'German model' that Gökalp, ideologue-in-chief of the CUP, promoted against the so-called 'French model'. In reality, Gökalp, who presented himself as a disciple of Émile Durkheim and nationalised the Durkhemian terminology in order to elaborate a scientific Turkish nationalism, knew very little about German philosophy. That was also the case of al-Ḥuṣrī, who shared most of Gökalp's social Darwinist, collectivist concepts of nationhood. In contrast to his opponent, however, he estimated that he had some credentials allowing him to comment on education's role in formating the European nations.

Gökalp considered Turkishness as a metahistorical soul that had remained unchanged throughout history; yet he also advocated the need to build a Turkish (not Ottoman) nation through state intervention.[55] As his scholarly texts and his ultra-nationalist poetry shows, he also thought that only the "genies and heroes" could incarnate this nation, whose members had to renounce their individual rights, "close their eyes and obey to the voice coming from above."[56] Al-Ḥuṣrī criticised Gökalp's ideas by enumerating what he saw as the main differences between the German and French models. According to him, the German people constituted a living organism, and the German Army was a real *Volkschule*[57] that educated large numbers of Germans. In a way that would certainly surprise some later scholars of nationalism, such as Hans Kohn[58] and Eugen Kamenka,[59] he argued that in France, as opposed to in Germany, it was the state that had elaborated the historical narrative and created the nation; in contrast, the German state was a product of a genuine, almost natural history and could not be separated from the (already) existing German nation. In France, the homeland was founded on the perception that the French nation had from its history, while in Germany national unity was based, before everything else, on language and culture. Thus, according to al-Ḥuṣrī, the German model was unsuitable for the Ottoman Empire, not least because the Ottomans had a religious unity, but also because they lacked any linguistic unity. Furthermore, in contrast to pre-Bismarckian Germany, the Ottomans already had a state, which made meaningless any nation-building. For al-Ḥuṣrī, the

Basam Tibi, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Nationalstaat: Islam und panarabischer Nationalismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1987).

55 Gökalp, *Makaleler v*, 69–104.

56 Hamit Bozarslan, "Ziya Gökalp", in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düsünce*, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Iletisim, 2001), 314–19.

57 Tibi, *Vom Gottesrecht zum Nationalstaat*, 137.

58 Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and the Background*, (New York: MacMillan, 1946).

59 Eugen Kamenka, *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976).

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Ottoman delay vis-à-vis Europe was neither due to the domination of the Turkish race, nor, notwithstanding the religious fanaticism that could be observed here and there, to Islam. Only the Ottomans' lack of "will and perseverance" could explain their decline.[60] In fact, al-Ḥuṣrī did not contest the Germanist arguments of Gökalp (and, broadly speaking, of the CUP), but simply used them to show the absurdity of transposing the 'German model' to the Ottoman Empire: in contrast to the situation of 1869–1870 in Germany, there existed an independent Ottoman state, but this state was not, and should not, be a Turkish one.

Şerif Pasha and the Liberal Option

Şerif Pasha, a Kurd from Suleymaniye, was a descendant of the famous Baban dynasty and an Ottoman officer graduated from the French Military Academy St Cyr, but he was best known as the Ottoman ambassador to Stockholm and a long-standing, albeit clandestine, benefactor of the pre-1905 CUP.[61] After 1908, he came close to Prince Sabahattin (1879–1948), the inspirer of what one could call an Ottoman liberalism. Sabahattin, a follower of Frederic Le Play and Edmond Demolins's 'School of Social Science', advocated radically decentralisating of the Ottoman Empire and developing individual initiative to change the Ottoman "social structures."[62] Although French educated, he strongly rejected the French model of centralisation, as well as the 'German model', and advocated instead the so-called 'English model'. Şerif lacked the intellectual thickness of Sabahaddin, but he and his marginal Ottoman Reform Party (*İslahat-ı Esasiye-i Osmaniye Fırkası*) shared most of Sabahaddin's/Sabahattin's views on key issues.

Şerif was well introduced in the Arab, Albanian and Greek political and intellectual milieu. Given his Kurdish identity, he was well aware of the complexity of Kurdish-Armenian relations. After the Proclamation of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, in 1908, he devoted all his energy and time to elaborating a just solution for the Ottoman nationalities in order to preserve Ottoman unity. The motto of "Ottomans without any distinction of race or of religion" was the subtitle of his journal, *Méchroutiette* (Constitutional Monarchy). According to his Ottoman Reform Party, the post-1908 CUP had evolved

60 Hilmi Ziya Ülken, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi* (İstanbul: Ülken Yayınları, 1979), 177ff.

61 Şerif Paşa *Bir Muhalifin Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Nehir Yayınları, 1990).

62 Hamit Bozarslan, "Le Prince Sabahaddin (1879–1948)", *Revue suisse d'Histoire* 53, no. 3 (2002): 287–301.

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into a "dangerous nationalist organisation",[63] whose policies could but lead to the destruction of the Empire.[64] Like Sabahattin did,[65] he observed the Albanian insurrection and asked himself if Albania was about to become a "contagious illness" for the rest of the Empire.[66] With his close collaborator Albert Fua, he defined Asia Minor as a "real Macedonia of nationalities", whose communities could not be coerced into becoming one entity, but could still be united under an Ottoman banner.[67] As Sabahattin had done, Şerif and his Party also criticised the secessionist tendencies among the non-Turkish populations:

> Well, we, the Ottomans who are in charge of the [journal] *Mecherouitiette*, we do repudiate this idea of independence of nationalities. We do defend the liberal tradition of the 1908 Revolution and the principle of equality that led to its taking place.[68]

The Ottoman Reform Party also insisted on the contradiction between the policy of enrolling Christians in the Ottoman Army as Ottoman citizens, and the discourse of the dominant Turkish nation, promoted by the CUP, and denounced the "outraging nationalism" of the latter.[69]

Şerif seemed to be extremely preoccupied by the Arab and Armenian issues. He had close dealings with Arab nationalists and sent a congratulatory telegram congratulation to the Arab Congress of Paris in 1913.[70] However, like Ahmed Naim Babanzade,[71] another Kurdish intellectual (who was Şerif's close relative but belonged to the 'Islamist' current), he strongly opposed any Arab secessionist project, fearing the outcome of such a scenario.[72] Concerning the Armenian issue, he observed that it had ceased to be exclusively Armenian and had evolved into an Armenian–Kurdish one. He legitimised Armenian de-

63 Albert Fua, "Réponse au Paris-journal", *Mecheroutiette* 31 (1912): 10.

64 Şerif Paşa, "Heure décisive", *Mecheroutiette* 39 (1913) : 2–6.

65 Cemal Kutay, *Fethi Okyar – Üç Devirde Bir Adam* (İstanbul: Kervan Yayınları, 1982),139.

66 Şerif Paşa, "Grandes manouvres diplomatiques", *Mecheroutiette* 31 (1913): 3.

67 Albert Fua, "Le Comité Union et Progrès contre les nationalités", *Mecheroutiette* 50 (1914): 22ff.

68 Ibid., 22.

69 Fua, "Réponse au Paris-journal", 10.

70 Şerif Paşa, "Télégramme au Congrès arabe [de 1913]", *Mecheroutiette* 50 (1914): 59f.

71 İsmail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslâmcılık Düşüncesi: Metinler/Kişiler* vol. 1 & 2 (İstanbul: Risale Yayınları, 1986–1987).

72 Şerif Paşa, "Entente entre les chefs arabes", *Mecheroutiette*, 50 (1914): 19.

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mands, but without directly accusing the Kurds.[73] In a statement he gave in 1914, he held the Hamidian and Unionist regimes responsible for the troubles in the region and urged the Armenians and Kurds to ally themselves with each other Şerif also thought that the Armenians and Kurds should work together and "loyally, for the prosperity and the security of the Ottoman Empire, as they did before the beginning of the intrigues" of the past Hamidian, and present Unionist rules. According to him, although from different origins, these "two beautiful races" shared "the same manners" as well as "the same ardent desire of reforms based on justice and equality", and this common goal should "unite them in a common action".[74]

Conclusion

The cases of al-Ḥuṣrī and Şerif Pasha show that adhering to Ottomanism was a means of defending the Ottoman Empire as a multi-ethnic, multireligious entity, but also of legitimising Arab, Kurdish and Armenian particularism. One could, thus, easily understand that their discussions were focalised on the issue of nationalism, nationhood and statehood: everyone was aware that criticising nationalism meant, before everything else, criticising Turkish nationalism, which either ignored Arab and Kurdish populations or aimed at their assimilation into Turkishness. However, condemning nationalism as fundamentally contradicting the Ottoman unity allowed them to imagine the Ottoman Empire through spatial and temporal landmarks, projections and imaginaries other than the exclusively Turkish ones imposed by the Unionist leaders. Their criticism of the Unionists' centralisation policies and Gökalp's ideal of a fusion between the state and the nation, was a means not only of opposing the monopolisation of power by the inner circle of the CUP, known as the Central Committee, but also of redefining the very notion of power in relation with local dynamics.

Like many other Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals, al-Ḥuṣrī and Şerif Pasha were among the prominent figures of a non-declared but yet existing Ottoman anti-nationalist front. This front was first defeated internally by the nationalist CUP, before losing any practical meaning after the Ottoman defeat in World War I.

73 Şerif Paşa, "Le soulèvement des Kurdes et ses causes", *Mecheroutiette* 50 (1914): 24.

74 *Mecheroutiette* "Les nationalités musulmanes en Turquie", *Mecheroutiette* 47 (1913): 41.

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